

Conference on Disarmament

13 August 2013

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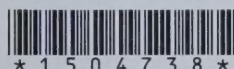
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Final record of the one thousand two hundred and ninety-fifth plenary meeting


Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 13 August 2013, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Mohammad Sabir Ismail(Iraq)

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The President: I call to order the 1295th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Before proceeding, I would like to extend a warm welcome to Mr. Van der Kwast, Ambassador of the Netherlands, who has assumed responsibilities as a representative of his Government to the Conference. On behalf of my own Government and on behalf of the Conference, Sir, I would like to assure you of our full cooperation and support.

Please also allow me to express on our collective behalf our deep condolences to Mr. Ivor Richard Fung, the Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament, who has recently suffered the loss of his father. Let me also convey my sincere congratulations to those members among us who celebrated Eid al-Fitr. My best wishes to you, your families and your countries.

Since we are in the last week of the presidency of Iraq, the time has come to make a few brief comments and to draw some conclusions. Allow me to start my comments by referring to the statement made before the Conference by Mr. Hoshyar Zebari on 25 June 2013:

“Iraq attaches major importance to the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament issues. The Conference has a good record. Unfortunately, it is now going through a very complicated period and has reached a decisive crossroads. In the light of increasing regional crises, terrorist threats and increased fear of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, it is of paramount importance for the Conference to redouble its efforts to reach an agreement on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work and to move forward and work on the Conference’s agenda items.”

With this understanding, given the critical period that the Conference is going through, and in accordance with the responsibility of the President as set out in rule 29 of the rules of procedure, which states that “The provisional agenda and the programme of work shall be drawn up by the President of the Conference with the assistance of the Secretary-General and presented to the Conference for consideration and adoption”, I started my assigned mission. Our main task was to move towards a compromise on the programme of work of the Conference. As I have said on several occasions, reaching an agreement on a programme of work that reflects the concerns of all Conference on Disarmament members has been my priority. A comprehensive and balanced programme of work remains of crucial importance for the Conference on Disarmament members. Let me remind you that submitting a programme of work is the responsibility of the President, but is at the same time a collective responsibility of all members. In line with the various proposals that have been put forward during this year’s session, we have been actively and intensively working over the past weeks in order to accomplish my task. I have put my best effort and energy into this, and I am using every tool at our disposal to achieve the desired outcome by bridging the gaps between the different positions in the Conference on Disarmament.

When I started my endeavour, it did not occur to me that I would not be able to get tangible results. On the contrary, I was optimistic about achieving a goal that we are all pursuing. During the consultations, we listened carefully to the views and opinions of the members, and we sought to incorporate them in the wording of the programme of work, all the while formulating common language based on common ground in order to achieve our common goal. After many consultations with the members on the draft programme of work, I believe we can say that the positions of the members fall into four different categories. Those members who belong to the first category, who make up the majority, supported and encouraged us to submit and adopt a programme of work as a necessary step. The second category consists of those Conference on Disarmament members who have expressed their concern about the formulation of the current draft programme of work but have also

expressed their readiness to join consensus for the sake of the common good. The third category comprises those Conference on Disarmament members who have voiced their concern by asserting that the language used does not meet their expectations. And the final category includes those member States that see the draft programme of work in the context of their national security concerns.

Obviously, the stalemate that the Conference is facing negatively affects multilateralism and the objective upon which this body is built. Thus, we have tried to conduct our work in the fully transparent manner that this task requires at all levels, including by engaging the capitals in order to overcome the impasse. My efforts have resulted in the draft programme of work of the Conference that is in your hands, document CD/1955. It is clear that the compromise we are seeking is to be found not only inside but also outside the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference is not working in a vacuum; rather, it is intimately connected with the international security environment. It is unfortunate that, once again, the Conference has not been able to agree on common language or on a minimum common denominator that could have allowed us to resume our substantive work. However, I am asking the secretariat to register document CD/1956 as an official Conference on Disarmament document, and we hope that it will be useful for the continuation of discussions and consultations in the future. I think it is worth building on the momentum we have created. I hope, however, that there will not be yet another obstacle in our path that breaks our will to make progress and to agree on a programme of work that will allow us to start negotiations in this forum.

For this reason, and based on the aforementioned developments, we were encouraged to explore alternatives. In this vein, we drew inspiration from the proposal presented by Mr. Tokayev on 18 June 2013 with regard to the establishment of an informal working group with a mandate to produce a programme of work. With a view to stimulating the general debate on this proposal, I devoted two plenary meetings to a debate on this subject, met with all regional groups and held bilateral consultations. Delegations welcomed this initiative and expressed their desire to reflect the ideas presented in the said document or draft decision, while offering valuable opinions and views on the key elements of the proposal. This has enabled us to evaluate and draw conclusions about a possible decision on the establishment of this informal working group. I have tried to extract from all the statements the most common elements to be included in a draft decision. However, what started off as an idea has now finally moved beyond the planning stage. In this respect, I have drafted a decision on the establishment of the informal working group, which the Conference on Disarmament secretariat will circulate to all members and observers as a non-paper shortly after this meeting. It is my intention to submit to you this Conference on Disarmament decision at the next plenary meeting, which will take place on Friday, 16 August 2013 at 3 p.m., so that we may come to a final decision on this issue. I believe that the time allotted will enable delegations to consult with their capitals.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the delegations for their substantive participation, their contributions and their interesting, meaningful and profound views and suggestions in relation to this initiative. I hope that with this initiative you will take a small step towards revitalization and better functioning of the Conference on Disarmament.

I will now turn to the list of speakers for today. I have two ambassadors on my list. The first speaker will be the Ambassador of the Netherlands, Mr. Henk Cor Van der Kwast.

Mr. Van der Kwast (Netherlands): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your warm words of welcome. As this is the first time that I am addressing the Conference on Disarmament, please allow me to use this opportunity to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency and assure you of the full support of my delegation.

Let me also extend my regards to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, and Deputy Secretary-General Mr. Jarmo Sareva, although neither of them are present today. I also want to thank my colleagues for their welcome. I look forward to working with you all.

For me, it is an honour and a pleasure to join the Conference on Disarmament. For the Netherlands, disarmament is and remains an important priority. The final goal is clear: we want to contribute to a safer world and strive towards drastic reductions of conventional weapons and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

A logical next and long overdue step in this regard is the negotiation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material. Such a treaty will help us both to continue on the path to nuclear disarmament and to strengthen our non-proliferation efforts.

To reach the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons, we must follow a road of long and complex negotiations and agreements. We firmly believe that, with every step we collectively manage to take on this difficult and often bumpy road, the world will indeed become a safer and better place. We owe it to our children and to future generations.

In order to be able to take these steps, we will all have to be bold and willing to search for what will sometimes be painful compromises and to persevere in our efforts. The recent successful conclusion of the Arms Trade Treaty shows that progress in multilateral disarmament is indeed possible.

In this regard, Mr. President, we want to express our gratitude to you and to the Iraqi delegation. Concerning your programme of work, you have made a very serious attempt to accommodate the different positions as best you could. However, in order for this effort to succeed, all sides will have to be willing to compromise.

To speak in disarmament terms, you did bite the bullet by presenting a programme of work. Although this bullet turned out to be a rubber bullet, in view of the very modest proposals it contained, it was a step forward. Unfortunately, today we just learned that even this modest programme did not meet the agreement of all delegations. We do sincerely regret that, once again, this opportunity did not work out.

At the same time, we do appreciate that you have designed a plan B. We welcome this plan and strongly support it, although I do not want to hide the fact that we consider this to be the very bottom line.

After 17 years of procedural obstructions, it is high time for the Conference on Disarmament to get its act together and start working on what it is meant to do, namely to negotiate disarmament treaties.

If we keep each other strangled in this procedural embrace for much longer, I believe the Conference on Disarmament will eventually lose its relevance and credibility. For how long can an international body thrive on the successes it achieved almost two decades ago? This is particularly true in a time of budget cuts.

Saying "no" is a stage in human development. Those of you who have children or have seen children growing up know that when they are toddlers they discover at some moment that they can say "no". That experience at that time is then so exciting that they will say "no" to everything. After a certain period the excitement is over, and you can talk with them normally. I hope that at some point the Conference on Disarmament will also get over its enthusiasm for saying "no" to proposals. But as a newcomer I may be very naive in thinking this.

As I stated, Mr. President, we do highly value your and your team's tireless efforts to get the ball rolling with an informal working group to produce a programme of work. This is not easy. For the Netherlands, the programme of work is not a goal in itself, but

rather a tool to get us to work on what we are supposed to do, which, as I said, is to negotiate treaties.

This summer I read *The Age of Deception*, in which a former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency looked back at the time he had spent in the organization. The choice of whether we have another decade of deception or another period of diplomatic *pas perdus* is in our hands. I will start my work here in the hope for “an age of hope and prospects”. As it is in our hands, and as I believe in our common commitment to this goal, I look forward to working with you all with this perspective.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his statement, his kind words addressed to the Chair and his support. The next speaker is the Ambassador of the Russian Federation, Mr. Alexey Borodavkin.

Mr. Borodavkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, allow me to express special gratitude to you and your colleagues for your active efforts to find a compromise programme of work for the Conference. You prepared a good-quality document which deserved general support. Thanks to your efforts, the Conference is now closer than ever to achieving consensus on a programme for its work. Unfortunately, we must note with great regret that your draft cannot yet be adopted. Nevertheless, we hope that this is not yet the end of the story, and that consultations will continue.

We hope that those who found this draft unacceptable will change their views, so that we will be able to adopt it and thus break the deadlock in the work of the Conference.

We are deeply convinced that ending the standstill in the Conference on Disarmament and resuming its substantive work constitute a very pressing necessity. We must remember that the Conference’s agenda contains a number of urgent issues whose solution is of great importance for international security. They include the problem of preventing the placement of weapons in outer space.

I would like to reiterate our hope that work on your proposal for a programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament will not end with today’s plenary meeting. We are sure that it will be continued in the informal working group suggested by Conference Secretary-General Tokayev. We consider that the idea he has put forward is very timely, and are ready to support it.

We thank you, Mr. President, for the draft decision you have circulated today on the establishment of a working group to produce a programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Russian Federation for his statement, his kind words addressed to the Chair and his support. I think that the Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Mr. Matthew Rowland, wanted to speak. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Rowland (United Kingdom): Mr. President, I would like to be first among our colleagues in thanking you for all your effort in attempting to reach consensus on a programme of work, even at this late stage in the Conference on Disarmament’s session. I think the amount of effort you have put into that is commendable. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland regrets that it has not been possible to achieve consensus on a programme of work. The United Kingdom believes that the vast majority of countries have shown flexibility in trying to reach consensus. Many of those countries have already stretched to a position that is very uncomfortable for them in pursuit of consensus, and we should not automatically expect there to be further flexibility in the future.

Turning to your proposal for an informal working group, I would like to reiterate my delegation’s support for this proposal. The United Kingdom will be keen to engage with the

informal working group should agreement be reached on that proposal, which we will approach with an open mind in awareness of the other disarmament initiatives that are taking place outside this forum and with an eye to the future, not to the past. We hope that others will do likewise, and that positions will not be overly constrained by those adopted in the past.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for his statement, his kind words addressed to the Chair and his support. I see that the Ambassador of Switzerland has asked for the floor.

Mr. Schmid (Switzerland): Mr. President, I would also not like to miss this opportunity to thank you for the efforts you have put into the elaboration of a programme of work. Like other speakers before me, I still would encourage delegations to take a careful look at this programme of work. Many delegations have made compromises in order to reach this stage, to arrive at this language, and I certainly consider this to still be a possibility that my delegation hopes will bear fruit. At the same time, like others before me, I would also encourage you as you follow the alternative path you have designed, and I express this delegation's support for your proposal on the establishment of an informal working group.

The President: Thank you for your statement, your support and your kind words addressed to the President. Would any other delegation like to take the floor?

Before the closing of the meeting, I would like to inform all delegations that, if you have any comments, we are ready to receive them until Thursday. I do not see any delegation that would like to take the floor, so we will conclude the meeting, and we will meet on Friday at 3 p.m. in this meeting room.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.